RESEARCH PROGRAMME ON
EDUCATION EMPLOYMENT
LINKAGES

Education Employment Linkages: Objective Two

Key Informant Interviews in Regional Communities

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Abstract

This report documents findings from the Key Informant stage of Objective 2 (Regional Communities) of the Education Employment Linkages research project. In the last quarter of 2009, interviews were conducted with service providers involved in helping young people with few or no qualifications with their post-school transition to tertiary education/training or employment. Those interviewed included providers of education/training (particularly in Private Training Establishments) and of connections services (involved in tracking and referral). Interviews focused on how providers assisted young people with few or no school qualifications to develop vocational imagination and labour market literacy, and how they facilitated linkages between education/training and employment. Three key concerns emerged from the provider perspective: (i) the difficulty of addressing the diverse and interconnected needs of young people in transition when funding is fragmented and 'siloed'; (ii) the question of whether success is best measured by means of 'hard' outcomes or according to progress towards achievement; (iii) the place, in the wider education sector, of these providers and the young people with whom they are working.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

1. This report focuses on the provision of education-employment assistance, at the regional level, to young people who leave school with few or no qualifications. This report builds on and deepens the analysis in EEL Report No. 3, which mapped aspects of the formal transition system of support available to young New Zealanders making education employment linkages.

2. A series of in-depth interviews was conducted with key informants working 'on the ground' with school leavers with few or no qualifications. Interviewees included managers and tutors in Tertiary Education Organisations offering foundation and pre-trade courses; connections services that track and assist school leavers (including Youth Transition Services); and disability support services. Forty two people were interviewed, in twenty-two organisations, in fourteen centres across the country.

3. The aim of the interviews was to explore how formal support systems can assist young people to make effective education employment linkages, and how the current system is, and is not, facilitating this.

Analytical Framework

4. TEOs and other youth service providers are important both as gatekeepers and enablers for young people in transition. Questions of access to, and participation in, both post-school education and employment underlie this discussion.

5. Four key themes identified in the international research literature influence young people's capacities to craft education-employment linkages. These are: identity formation, discovery and development of abilities, opportunities and constraints, and infrastructural pathways through education into employment.

6. The first two of these themes are closely linked to the concept of *vocational imagination*: the capacity to imagine oneself in a career pathway, with some specificity about what that might involve in terms of educational qualifications and occupational possibilities. The second two themes are closely linked to the concept of *labour market literacy:* the ability to read the labour market in terms of possibilities for a career pathway.

7. In order for young people to actively employ both a vocational imagination and labour market literacy in crafting their education-employment linkages, they need access to, and facilitated movement within, the transition infrastructure and the labour market.

8. The interviews undertaken for this part of the research explored the ways in which providers understood their capacity for enabling young people to develop vocational imagination and labour market literacy, and for facilitating young people's exercise of these in making education employment linkages.

Findings

9. *Diversity.* Diverse providers catered for a diverse range of young people, from those who were almost work-ready to those who had become disengaged from learning while in school, to those with a significant truancy history and high levels of need. Inclusion is a key issue here: how can this diversity be catered for so that every young person has access to the transition infrastructure and assistance to navigate a pathway within it?

10. *Learning support.* Many young people required significant support to even begin to engage in learning, and on-going support to remain engaged. This included social work, health care and counselling. Providers referred young people to services as appropriate, but also found it necessary to offer in-house support beyond education narrowly defined, because learning could not be separated off from the process of addressing these other needs. One of the most commonly expressed concerns was that the 'siloed' nature of funding made catering adequately for these young people very difficult.

11. *Transition support for disabled young people.* This involves beginning the transition process early, and managing disability throughout, as new settings are encountered (in employment or tertiary education). It is important to review progress early and often with a view to making adjustments that can assist in a stable, supported process. Inclusion is important; 'continuing the oddness' is not inclusive.

12. *Fostering vocational imagination:* providers spoke of this in terms of helping young people to gain confidence in their own capacity to learn, to set goals for themselves which included career goals, and to learn through a pedagogy appropriate to their needs: specifically this involved fostering good relationships between tutors and students; self-paced learning; project-based learning that was relevant, contextual, integrated, specific, and holistic; and career education that encouraged career conversations between students and tutors.

13. *Fostering labour market literacy:* providers spoke of this in terms of helping young people to develop their own pathways plans into further education and employment. Students were encouraged to find out about occupations for themselves and to develop networks through part time work and volunteering. This also included being realistic about possibilities, likely income and so forth.

14. *Facilitating linkages:* training providers were active in facilitating linkages (into further education and/or the labour market) by enhancing opportunities, mitigating constraints and smoothing infrastructural transition pathways. They cultivated relationships with employers both informally and formally and employed work brokers. They stressed the importance of all partners understanding each other well, and recognising that tensions must be carefully managed between business needs and the learning needs of students.

Conclusions: Key concerns

15. Three issues in particular emerged as common and urgent. The first related to what providers saw as the siloed nature of funding, which made assisting young people with diverse and inter-connected needs difficult. For young people with significant needs, wraparound support was regarded as the most effective way to deliver assistance. 'Person-centred' approaches, rather than 'service centred' approaches were advocated as the best way to ensure that young people received the transition assistance they needed. This

concern echoes Hudson's (2006:56-57) comment that 'the purpose of transition planning is not to move individuals from one service to another, but rather to support a young adult to move towards a new life stage'. 'Whole system' or 'person centred mapping' was regarded as an important way forward.

16. Second, there was much discussion about how best to measure success: whether in terms of 'hard' outcomes (such as success in the labour market) or in terms of 'soft' outcomes that measured progress towards achievement relative to the starting point of each individual. Supporters on the former (a minority) preferred a hard outcomes approach because it put the onus on providers to work hard to deliver for their young people. Others were concerned that this approach led to (i) creaming; (ii) 'coaching' in credit attainment; and (iii) the exclusion of young people with significant needs.

17. Third, there was evidence that the location in the transition infrastructure of PTEs catering for young people with low or no qualifications continues to be unstable in various ways. Training providers spoke of feeling marginalised in the education sector but argued that they can cater for a large minority of young people who have not engaged well with school culture and are unlikely to engage well with the culture of polytechnics or universities. Several providers also spoke of feeling like 'guinea pigs' with the frequent restructuring of the PTE-TEC relationship and regretted the disestablishment of the TEC relationship managers. These concerns suggest that a stable transitions infrastructure has yet to emerge for school leavers with low or no qualifications.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background

The Education Employment Linkages project is a five year research project[1] exploring how transition support systems can best help young New Zealanders make good education employment linkages to benefit themselves, their communities, and the national economy.

This document is one of four reports produced for stage three of the project. It focuses on the provision of education-employment assistance, at the regional level, to young people who leave school with few or no qualifications. Other reports produced from this stage of the project examine other dimensions of the wider education-employment infrastructure, specifically, school communities, Māori and Pasifika communities, and employer-led channels[2].

The work discussed in this report follows closely from work in stage two of the project which mapped aspects of the formal transition system of support available to young New Zealanders making education employment linkages[3]. This report builds on that earlier work by exploring the transition infrastructure in more depth, examining forms of assistance offered by various Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs) and connections services whose work with young people is associated with education employment linkages.

1.2 Method

This stage of the research was designed as a series of in-depth interviews with key informants who are working 'on the ground' with school leavers with few or no qualifications.

The organisational focus

Transition assistance for young people with few or no school qualifications is offered by a wide range of service providers across the country. Because the focus of the EEL project is on systems rather than short term programmes or projects, the regional communities strand has focused on organisations that:

- have on-going funding from an institutional base (usually, the state);
- have well established formal processes and protocols, formal engagement with clients and, often, formal links to NZQA.

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1 Funded by the Foundation for Research Science and Technology.

2 These, along with reports from earlier stages of the project, are available on the EEL website, www.eel.org.nz/publications.

3 Vaughan, K., H. Phillips, P. Dalziel and J. Higgins, 2009. See, in particular, Chapter Three which deals with the regional communities strand of the research.

- offer transition assistance that is primarily concerned with education-employment linkages for young people. Inevitably some organisations assist young people in multiple ways because their clients are undergoing multiple transitions and have diverse needs, but the focus here is on organisations whose primary role is education-employment linkages.

- have an on-going life, that is to say, one-off projects or programmes that receive short term funding are excluded from the research.

Organisations that have a specific Māori or Pasifika focus are not included in this strand of the project because these are incorporated into the Māori and Pasifika communities strand (Objective 3).

As noted in our third report (Vaughan et al 2009, p. 18), there are good reasons for focussing on established organisations rather than on one-off projects and programmes. Extensive international research points to the importance of developing a stable institutional infrastructure for transition (apprenticeship is the most well known example). By contrast, ad hoc youth programmes, which can be subject to short term policy reversals, not only tend to acquire lowly status, but often come and go with such frequency that no opportunity is gained for organisational and policy learning and development[4].

The interviews

Interviewees were chosen from respondents to a web-based survey of providers working with young people with few or no qualifications conducted in stage two (the mapping phase) of the project. In that survey respondents were asked if they thought that their organisation was engaged in interesting or innovative approaches to education employment linkages for young people. Those who responded to this question were invited to take part in the further stage of key informant interviews. Many responded positively and were interviewed. In general, those interviewed were managers and/or tutors in the organisations visited, which included Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs), primarily Private Training Establishments (PTEs), offering foundation and pre-trade courses; connections services that track and assist school leavers (including Youth Transition Services); and disability support services.

In total, visits were made to twenty-two organisations and interviews conducted with forty-two service providers in fourteen centres (Invercargill, Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington, Paraparaumu, Lower Hutt, Napier, Hastings, Otorohanga, Rotorua, Tauranga, Waitakere, Auckland, Manukau). Interviews were conducted in the last quarter of 2009.

The Information Sheet and interview schedule are included in Appendices at the end of this report.

The aim of these interviews was to explore how formal support systems can assist young people to make effective education employment linkages, and how the current system is, and is not, facilitating this. This kind of research design is not intended to provide comprehensive coverage of everything that is happening in this field, but rather to tap the experience and expertise of those working directly with young people and, from these key informants' reflections on their own experience and practice, to identify themes relevant to the development of new knowledge in this field.

[4] See Ryan 1999, 2000, 2001, Higgins 2003, Higgins et al. 2008, Vaughan et al. 2009.

1.3 Structure of the Report

Chapter Two introduces the analytical framework used to inform this strand of the research. It recaps important themes identified in the international literature review; these are then developed to identify a way forward for analysis of the interview data. Chapter Three sets out the main themes that emerged from the interview data. In Chapter Four, three key issues that emerged from the research are discussed.

Chapter 2

Analytical Framework

2.1 Introduction

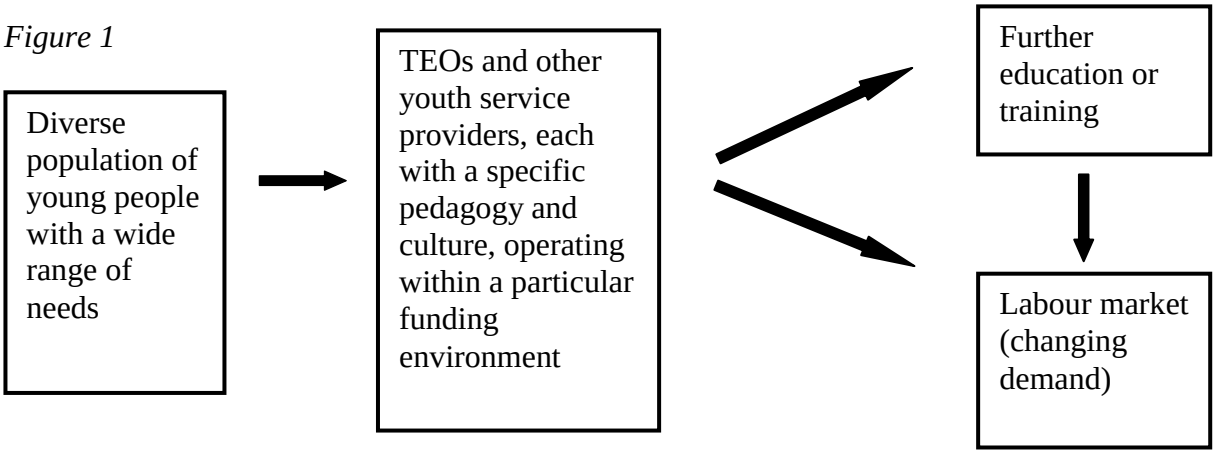
In helping young people to make education employment linkages, TEOs and other youth service providers are located between, on one hand, an extremely diverse potential client base of young people and, on the other, a labour market in which levels of demand and the nature of that demand are constantly changing. Thus located, providers themselves are diverse in terms of pedagogical philosophy and organisational culture and they must operate within a funding environment that structures their operation in highly specific ways.

2.2 Access and participation

The location of TEOs and other youth service providers in the transition infrastructure make them important both as gatekeepers and enablers for young people in transition. At each arrow in Figure 1 issues of access and participation are in play, that is, there are structures and relationships that may facilitate or inhibit a young person in gaining entry to a course or a job, and then remaining engaged in that course or job over time. Access to education and training is shaped by institutional structures and practices, and by the levels and nature of funding available. Access to the labour market is shaped by the nature of demand, including available jobs and employer preferences. Access to both education and employment is mediated by significant relationships (e.g. with families/whanau, peers, teachers, tutors, employers, etc.) and by the cultural, social and (sometimes) financial capital of these relationships.

These questions of access run through the following discussion as we explore the nature of the transition infrastructure for young people with few or no qualifications and the location in that infrastructure of youth training providers and connections services. Factors internal to providers, particularly pedagogical approaches and organisational culture, are key elements in this, as are external factors, particularly funding structures that heavily influence selection criteria and organisational practice.

Figure 1



2.3 Education-employment linkages – international research themes

In our literature review four themes emerged as important for young people making education employment linkages. These are summarised below. A detailed discussion is offered in Higgins et al (2008).

(i) Identity formation. Recent understandings of youth transitions conceptualise identity not as a state definitively arrived at, but as relational, multiple, contested, and dynamic. This is a complex and fluid understanding of identity that challenges traditional models of career decision-making by proposing that identity is neither fixed (as in trait theory) nor linear (as in developmental theory).

Since many schools tend to communicate an 'ideal' identity that is associated with the majority culture and dominant social class, students who belong to neither are, not surprisingly, those most likely to take on the identity of 'school resister' and to be given the (unchosen) identity of being 'challenging' or 'a failure'. This has important implications for those whose job it is to engage these young people in post-school learning (see Higgins et al 2008 pp. 15-20).

(ii) Discovery and development of abilities. Educators have an important role in helping young people to discover and develop their abilities, and from this discovery to set and pursue career related goals. Young people's understandings of their own learning capacities are critical to this work. This is clearly important for those working with young people who may have disengaged from learning while at school and who, as a consequence, have no confidence in their own learning capacities. Helping these young people to (re)gain confidence in their ability to learn is a crucial step in enabling them to discover and develop their abilities and to set goals related to these abilities.

Dynamic working relationships between educators and young people that facilitate 'career conversations' can play a significant role in helping young people with their identity work and related goal setting. Some research suggests that those who have career related goals have a better chance than those who do not of establishing themselves in a stable career pathway that is a good match for the education or training they have done (see Higgins et al 2008 pp. 21-28).

(iii) Recognition of opportunities and constraints. Young people are enmeshed in structures and networks of relationships that can have a powerful effect on the level of opportunity and constraint they face in making education employment linkages. These include family/whanau neighbourhood, school, the tertiary education market and the labour market. Within these, young people encounter expectations and gain access, or are denied access, to various forms of capital (financial, social, cultural and credential). Doors open or close accordingly.

It is important for young people and their educators to gain some understanding of the constraints that they face and also of ways to facilitate the opening out of opportunities. For example, young people in poor or remote communities can be adversely affected by the limited educational and employment opportunities available close to home. One way to assist them is through the introduction of quality educational facilities into these communities, making education 'at home' an option, which may be important for those with few financial resources and those who wish to remain in their community. Economic development, and/or the development of close links between education and industry networks locally, can generate opportunities for good education employment linkages to take place. A New Zealand example

of a rural community establishing a new educational facility and creating close links between education and local industry can be found in Otorohanga where a trade school was established with support from a regional polytechnic and local businesses (see below Section 3.6).

A second possible approach involves reducing the perceived and actual risks of leaving home to find education or work elsewhere by enhancing young people's access to outside networks, that is, to networks that may offer better opportunities than those available in the home neighbourhood but which are also able to provide a strong sense of belonging and security (see Higgins et al 2008 pp. 29-35).

(iv) Infrastructural pathways through education into employment. In New Zealand, these pathways have not been strongly institutionalised except for some young people entering the professions. Most young people have been expected to find their own way on leaving school. For school leavers who do not go into polytechnic or university courses this can be challenging, particularly when many employers are reluctant to employ young people straight from school (see Higgins et al 2008 pp. 37-46).

In the 1980s and 1990s, in the absence of institutionalised pathways, these young people tended to be placed into ad hoc remedial programmes which were not necessarily formally linked into a national qualifications framework. Local and international research indicates that such an approach is unlikely to be helpful for several reasons (see section 1.2 above). To make effective education employment linkages, young people need access to tertiary education that enables them to create educational pathways (staircasing) that are formally (and widely) recognised. This means having access to courses and qualifications that are credible and reliable (meaningful to employers, educational institutions, students and parents), transparent (it is clear what they represent), and flexible (they can be attained and used in a number of ways). Such courses and qualifications are less likely to be stigmatised than ad hoc remedial programmes; they can provide a sound basis for organisational learning over time; and they are less likely than short-term programmes to be subject to short-term funding horizons.

2.4 Vocational imagination and labour market literacy

The themes outlined above can be encapsulated in the concepts of vocational imagination and labour market literacy[5], where:

- vocational imagination concerns the capacity to imagine oneself in a career pathway, with some specificity about what that might involve in terms of educational qualifications and occupational possibilities. The themes of *identity formation* and *the discovery and development of abilities* are relevant for this.

- labour market literacy concerns the ability to read the labour market in terms of possibilities for a career pathway. The themes of *recognition of opportunities and constraints in the labour market* and an understanding of *infrastructural pathways through education into employment* are relevant for this.

In order for young people to actively employ both vocational imagination and labour market literacy in crafting their education-employment linkages, they need access to, and facilitated movement within, the transition infrastructure and the labour market. Providers have a role in

[5] These concepts are developed more fully in Higgins, J. Nairn, K. & Sligo, J. (2010).

enabling this process (e.g. entry to higher education and/or the labour market) by enhancing opportunities, mitigating constraints and smoothing infrastructural pathways.

The interviews undertaken for this part of the research explored the ways in which providers understood their capacity for enabling young people to develop vocational imagination and labour market literacy, and for facilitating young people's exercise of these in making education employment linkages.

Chapter 3

Findings

3.1 Diversity in the client base

The organisations visited are variously located within the transition infrastructure: they included providers of connections and referral services, foundation and pre-trade courses and other education courses above foundation level. They occupied a fairly wide spectrum in relation to the needs of the young people who formed their client base. Whereas those involved in transitions/connections services generally worked with whatever needs young people presented with, those involved directly with education/training tended to focus on addressing particular levels of need:

- Some were focussed on taking young people who were almost work-ready but wanted some NZQA qualifications in order to move on to a polytechnic or university, or into an apprenticeship or equivalent.

- Some took young people who had become disengaged from learning while in secondary school. These were often referrals (e.g. from Work and Income NZ.).

- Some took young people who not only had become disengaged from learning, but had experienced significant truancy over an extended period of time, and who had significant levels of need in relation to health and wellbeing.

Inclusion is a key issue here: how can this diversity be catered for so that every young person has access to the transition infrastructure and assistance to navigate a pathway within it?

3.2 Addressing the fundamentals – learning support

Most of those interviewed spoke of young people requiring significant levels of support in order to reach the point at which they could begin to engage in learning, and on-going support in order to remain engaged. This support often included social work (including family work), health care and counselling or psychotherapy.

With some providers, learning support was offered in-house: tutors in training establishments took on multiple roles including a degree of pastoral care, and in some cases dedicated pastoral care workers were employed. Connections services offered an intensive focus on pastoral care including tracking or follow-up of school leavers, assessment of needs, and referral to appropriate services.[6] All providers mentioned referring young people to agencies where/when they thought it appropriate. Many spoke highly of these agencies, although some had the experience of being forced back on their own resources when young people had

[6] A small number of TEO providers expressed concern that the YTS organisations in their area were working less as connections (tracking and referral) services and more as service providers themselves. Where this was mentioned, it was generally in the context of observing that a good connections service was needed.

urgent needs that were not being addressed adequately elsewhere. Some spoke of young people in desperate situations regarding safety, food and health.

Most providers noted, however, that when working with young people with significant needs there was no 'quick fix': learning could not be sectioned off from dealing with issues of safety, anger, life skills, coping skills and so forth, indeed the learning process raised many of these problems. Success in addressing these issues required diverse forms of assistance delivered in a holistic, or at least well connected, way. Results could not be measured in the short term.

Most providers observed that current funding structures made holistic approaches to learning difficult to achieve. There was frustration among those working with high needs young people in particular, at what was perceived to be a siloed approach to funding. There was general concern that the high levels of need experienced by these young people were not adequately recognised in funding structures and access to services. 'We need funders and auditors to understand our clientele', that is, to understand the levels and complexity of their needs, was a common refrain.

PTEs are located in the transition infrastructure as educators/trainers, but many providers observed that, in order to engage in learning, many of their students needed much more than educational assistance, narrowly defined. One of the most commonly expressed concerns in these interviews was that the siloed nature of funding made catering for these young people very difficult.

3.3 Transition support for disabled young people[7]

Interviews were conducted in two organisations involved in transition support for disabled young people. There was strong agreement among interviewees on the following:

- Starting transition early for disabled young people is very important, as is including them in normal transition processes as far as possible. It is important that they and their parents expect that transition will happen for them and are thinking about this from at least the age of 14 years. Bringing services on board early, rather than in late adolescence as often happens, means it is not too late to establish effective pathways by the time of leaving school.

- It is useful for disabled young people to check out and visit tertiary institutions before enrolling so they can sort out how to manage their disability in the new environment. Interviewees observed that often tertiary institutions are felt to be more inclusive than schools, a perception they attributed to schools often focusing on a therapeutic orientation towards these young people rather than prioritising learning expectations.

- 'Natural supports' are important, that is, finding support and assistance in ordinary areas of life, and learning the skills to access these forms of support when needed.

- The learning of life skills needs to be embedded in life – not in preparation for life. 'Continuing the oddness' is not inclusive. It is not necessarily helpful to wait 'until they are ready – young people in transition often aren't ready and they do it anyway'. 'Learning is about discovery.' 'It's much harder to learn life skills at 25 than at 15'.

[7] For a comprehensive review, see Cleland, G. and A. Smith 2010.

- Employment: often disabled young people are not in part time employment during the school years. Coming to a first job at 25, rather than at 15, can involve significant socialisation and skills issues.

- Transition involves managing disability in a new setting (employment or tertiary education), and reviewing this early and often with a view to making adjustments that can assist in a stable process.

3.4 Developing vocational imagination

Developing a vocational imagination is about facilitating identity formation and the discovery and development of abilities among young people so that they develop the capacity to imagine themselves in a career pathway. Those involved in education/training spoke of this in terms of helping young people to gain confidence in their own capacity to learn, to set goals for themselves and to learn through a pedagogy appropriate to their needs.

Confidence and self esteem: these were regarded as key steps towards learning. 'Confidence is the beginning … letting them find out what they can do.' Tutors observed that their 'main job is to give young people hope that they can do something, be something.' 'Everyone that walks in here is scared – you've got to calm them down' before they can learn. 'They surprise themselves with what they can do and how far they can go'. Tutors spoke of 'the light coming on' when students looked at why school didn't work for them, and came to understand their own learning styles. This could take a long time, e.g. six to twelve months of building self-confidence, respect and identifying what a goal might be. 'The weight of failure' was heavy for many who came from school. Many were initially unable to set goals. One provider commented that the Individual Diagnostic Assessment Tool (from TEC) helped the process of reducing anxiety and enabling young people to engage in self discovery. In some organisations students were accepted first for a trial period and had to earn a place – this success, at the beginning of their renewed engagement with learning, was good for their confidence.

Pedagogy: there was a strong consensus about the elements of successful pedagogy for these young people:

- Good relationships lie at the heart of good pedagogy. Staff observed the importance of cultivating an atmosphere where each young person felt cared for (often the phrase 'family atmosphere' was used) as well as a culture of being 'like a workplace' to give trainees an understanding of what it would be like once they were in the workforce (e.g. the importance of punctuality, respect for others, high expectations of performance). Many organisations actively cultivated a professional looking space to enhance this approach. Interviewees spoke of the importance of making their organisational culture and their space 'not like school'.

- It was important for young people to consider 'what do they understand of themselves as learners?' including their own assessment of what kind of learning worked best for them.

- Self-paced learning was used by many providers. This meant 'starting where the students are at', 'looking for opportunities to cultivate an 'a-ha' moment', 'going from where they are at and drilling down to enable them to move somewhere else in their thinking'. In one organisation this took the form of looking at the skills the young people had and developing courses around these skills: the organisation moved from offering sports based

courses to offering entrepreneurial courses after observing the skills and interests of its students.

- Many providers stressed the importance of project-based learning that was 'relevant, contextual, integrated, specific, and holistic'. Some noted with concern that it was time-intensive to foster this kind of learning and that this was not well recognised within current funding parameters. They observed that 'it would be much easier to coach students and so get the credit, tick the outcome box and so get the funding', but that students would not necessarily have learned anything by the end of such a process. Some had experience of young people coming to them with paper credits but clearly lacking in the learning that should have accompanied those credits.

- All spoke about career education and career planning as important. Some were in the process of developing their career education capacity, and many observed the importance of having staff who were professionally qualified as career educators. One manager observed that having a professional career practitioner in every TEO was vital and suggested that smaller organisations in an area could share such a position.

- Young people were encouraged to find out about occupations themselves, and often tutors were encouraged to build this discussion into their courses so that these career conversations became part of everyday learning. Some observed that young people were more likely to confide their hopes and dreams to a tutor whom they saw every day and with whom they felt comfortable, rather than a specialist career educator whom they might meet infrequently at school or on a course.

Goal setting: this was challenging for some young people when they first arrived at a course. This was particularly true for high needs young people who were focused strongly on the present moment and on their own coping and survival strategies. Once they felt more secure and confident in themselves, they could 'think forward' and begin to consider goal-setting. For this reason some tutors left goal setting and pathways planning until their students were at a stage when they could approach this with less anxiety.

Sometimes goal-setting involved going back to what these young people had dreamed of being/doing as children and enabling them to say what they wanted and to not be ashamed of this. Commonly, these young people believed that 'careers are for smart kids' (that is, young people who have been successful at school) and they saw themselves instead as having a series of 'jobs'. This meant that they generally did not apply the concept of career pathways to their own transition. They often had very narrow understandings of careers and occupations.

Sometimes providers found it useful to work backwards from what students wanted – e.g. some simply wanted a good income and/or a particular lifestyle that required a certain level of income. Managing expectations around this was important.

3.5 Developing labour market literacy

Labour market literacy involves the capacity to recognise opportunities and constraints in the labour market and to understand infrastructural pathways through education into employment. These capacities contribute to an individual's ability to read the labour market in terms of possibilities for a career pathway. Providers identified a range of ways in which they tried to facilitate this:

- Tutors assisted young people in the development of pathways plans in a range of ways: from 'nudging' to 'helping' to being 'hands on' in working with them to, for example, explore Seek, Career Services and other useful websites as well as the prospectuses of local polytechnics. Tutors stressed that 'for young people, coming to us isn't the endpoint' – rather they should see themselves stair-casing' into further education and employment.

- Students were encouraged to do their own career pathways homework – to look for themselves since the tutors (even specialist careers educators) could not be expert in all occupations.

- Providers set up their spaces and organisational cultures to be as similar to workplaces as possible so that students could be socialised in work processes and cultures.

- Tutors stressed the importance of being very practical about work, about earnings in particular.

- In some cases employers and workers came in to talk about occupations and career progression.

- Students were encouraged to take up part-time work to get an understanding of the labour market and also to volunteer as this provided opportunities for them to network, to try new things without pressure, to see trends and get a reality check on the labour market.

- In one town, a local careers expo was set up and for the first few years outside organisations were not invited; local businesses were asked to work together and not to compete with each other; stalls were staffed by young people; and the stalls were 'hands-on, not desks and brochures' to encourage young people to explore local opportunities.

Helping young people to develop a vocational imagination and labour market literacy is a significant step towards building their capacity to make effective education employment linkages. Whether these linkages get made depends also, of course, on the wider context of the tertiary education and labour markets. Facilitating access to these markets was regarded by providers as an important part of their role.

3.6 Facilitating linkages

To complement the development of vocational imagination and labour market literacy among their students, providers were active in facilitating linkages (into further education and/or the labour market) by enhancing opportunities, mitigating constraints and smoothing infrastructural transition pathways.

Providers cultivated relationships with employers in which trust and appropriate expectations were very important. Managers and tutors interviewed were generally well networked personally and had often developed these networks over many years. Some drew on these networks informally, as needed, while others had more formal arrangements. The latter included formal partnership agreements and in one case, guarantees by local businesses to employ graduates (see box below).

Where more formal arrangements existed, reciprocity was structured into the relationship, for example, involving employers in the co-design of aspects of courses in line with their own skill needs.

All training providers had someone acting as a work broker – in some larger organisations this was a dedicated position. One manager spoke of his work broker's job as 'matching' rather than 'placement': 'first comes career education, then training, then matching…' This person argued against 'railroading' young people into courses without career education and argued for the importance of career education before training or placement 'to see what they would like to do, and are suited to doing'.

In some cases, facilitating linkages included links to social services. Some recommended that case managers should work alongside young people, going out into the community with them if services were not provided 'in-house', in order to help them develop networks and gain confidence in dealing with people.

Otorohanga Youth Programmes

A comprehensive example of the facilitation of linkages was found in Otorohanga, where the community had effectively created its own transition infrastructure.

A local trade school was established, with involvement from Wintec and agreement from local businesses to guarantee jobs for graduates. Employer Partnership groups and a Trades Advisory Board were part of this infrastructure.

A Trades Apprenticeship Co-ordinator position was established. This person was locally rather than regionally based (as Modern Apprenticeship Co-ordinators are), and had a smaller case load than the MACs. The TAC position was created to offer on-going pastoral support and general oversight for these young people and was viewed as complementary to the MAC role.

Public acknowledgement of the success of trade graduates was regarded as important.

A Connections service was established to follow up local young people as they left school.

Good relationships between different groups in the community were regarded as fundamental to success, so the Mayor spent a lot of time in the community fostering these relationships.

The entire community was regarded as a resource with huge capacity to give career information to young people.

In all cases, interviewees stressed the importance of:

- all partners understanding each other well
- all partners recognising that tensions must be carefully managed between business needs on the one hand, and the learning needs of clients on the other.

Chapter 4

Conclusion: Key Concerns

4.1 Introduction

Among the issues raised by interviewees, three in particular emerged as common, and urgent, concerns with respect to the functioning of support systems for young people making education employment linkages. These are discussed below.

4.2 A person-centred or service-centred approach?

Fragmentation and the siloed nature of funding (e.g. between education, health, social services etc.) was the most frequently mentioned concern raised by providers, after concerns about funding levels themselves. This issue was raised particularly in relation to the diverse and inter-connected needs of the young people providers were working with. As noted in the previous chapter, providers often found that young people needed diverse forms of support in order to engage, and remain engaged, in learning. For young people with significant needs, wraparound support was generally regarded as the most effective way to deliver assistance. Providers commented that the siloed nature of funding made this difficult and often cumbersome, requiring them to manage multiple contracts and/or to direct young people to a multitude of separate services.

'Person-centred' approaches, rather than 'service centred' approaches were advocated as the best way to ensure that young people received the transition assistance they needed, and did not 'fall through the cracks' moving from one service to another, or find that they could not access the specific support they needed. Examining the situation of young people with learning disabilities in transition in the United Kingdom, Hudson (2006: 57) observes the tendency for organisations under financial pressure 'to focus upon their "core business" – a strategy that assumes some other agency picks up "non-core" business. The difficulty arises where an issue falls into nobody's core business…'. Some providers argued that young people in transition are vulnerable to this because they are undergoing so many different transitions simultaneously and because their individual needs are not easily isolated. The concern for person-centred and holistic approaches echoed Hudson's (2006:56-57) comment that:

> the purpose of transition planning is not to move individuals from one service to another, but rather to support a young adult to move towards a new life stage.

Hudson argues that in order to accomplish this it is important to clarify expectations at national, area and local level, a concern that providers spoken to here would certainly agree with. He further suggests (and many providers would agree) that 'whole system' or 'person centred mapping' is an important way forward as an approach to transition for young people with significant needs (2006:59):

> the critical issues are not how the government should allocate its resources among competing objectives … Rather they are where, in the complex welter of relationships at the delivery level, are the individuals who have the closest proximity to the problems, and what resources, financial and otherwise, do they have to address them?

4.3 'Hard' outcomes or 'progress towards achievement' as measures of success?

This concern relates to how best to measure the success of these organisations in helping young people. Should the framework for evaluation be based on 'hard' outcomes (such as success in the labour market) or on so-called 'soft' outcomes that measure progress towards achievement relative to the starting point of each individual?

More than one manager observed that funding was now 'much more hard-nosed': 'Now it's no outcomes – no funding'. The question this raised was: what is a realistic model for measuring outcomes given the diversity of the client base?

Some providers preferred a hard outcomes-based funding model rather than a progress-based approach because it put the onus on providers to work hard to deliver for their young people in a meaningful way. These providers were concerned that a soft-outcomes model gave providers too much leeway to make excuses about why their clients were not achieving success in further education or the labour market.

Others critiqued a hard outcomes model on the grounds that it could lead to:

- creaming – providers would only taking those young people who were most likely to achieve the stated outcomes. Some providers commented that they were already doing this; otherwise they would not survive in the current funding environment.

- 'tick-box' learning, in which young people were not actually learning, but were being coached towards the attainment of credits with tutors doing a lot of their work for them. Some providers had observed this with young people coming to them from other TEOs.

- not catering for young people with significant needs, who needed a lengthy period of help in order to engage in learning – or who took a long time to learn. The question was raised, 'when standards are set the same regardless of client need, what happens to young people with high needs?' Some providers were taking on young people for whom they were not funded, such as those 'who would be early exemption if the process was more manageable' and 'who are just wandering the streets' but 'who else will take them?' Comment was made that high needs funding needed to follow young people from school into whatever training they did.

Some providers also expressed concern that funding based on hard outcomes could not take account of the vagaries of the labour market.

A number of providers were doing their own work investigating the use of soft outcomes and, in particular, how to make these measurable.

Interviewees spoke about the need for recognition in the funding structure of high needs young people and the organisations that are trying to facilitate their learning.

> Twenty weeks is not going to turn these [high needs] young people around … they have many issues, and we have to fix all that and produce outcomes.

4.4 The transition infrastructure

There was evidence that the location in the transition infrastructure of PTEs catering for young people with low or no qualifications continues to be unstable in various ways.

Some training providers felt marginalised in the education sector. They argued that PTEs have a legitimate place in the sector because they can provide a different culture from that found in schools, polytechnics or universities, and that they should be taken seriously as valid places of learning.

In support of this argument, some providers observed that among TEOs, PTEs catered for a large minority of young people who are not being catered for by schools, polytechnics or universities. These are young people who have not engaged well with school culture and are unlikely to engage well with the culture of polytechnics or universities. Some PTE providers expressed concern that they, and the young people they catered for, were perceived in the wider education sector as not fitting within a 'proper' transition pathway (school – polytechnic/university – labour market).

In relation to this perception it is worth noting that PTEs enrol a significant proportion of those who have left school with no qualifications. In 2008, for example, 40 per cent of domestic students who studied for NCEA in the period 2004-2007 and entered tertiary education for the first time in 2008 with no school qualifications (but with some NZQA credits), were enrolled in a PTE. This percentage drops sharply for those with a Level 1 qualification (to 26 per cent) and again for those with Level 2 (19 per cent) and Level 3 (5 per cent) qualifications[8]. These figures should be seen alongside stated government priorities for the ITP sector:

> Government priorities for improved performance in the ITP sector are to increase provision of qualification programmes at Level 4 and above, and to increase course and qualification completion rates, especially for students under 25 years old.[9]

With many employers reluctant to take on school leavers (Dalziel 2010), and the ITP sector asked to prioritise programmes at Level 4 and above, there is a clear need for the tertiary sector to cater for young people with few or no school qualifications. Support for this conclusion is offered by Loader and Dalgety's (2008) statistical analysis for the Ministry of Education and their conclusion that:

> In 2005, of the 7400 school leavers with little or no formal attainment (13 percent of all school leavers), over 3100 students chose to continue their education in tertiary institutions. Almost all of these students are studying level 1-3 certificates that are comparable with the study options offered in the schooling sector. We do not know why some students are choosing to pay for tertiary education rather than taking advantage of the free schooling sector: though it suggests that the schooling sector is not meeting these students' needs in some way, or that the tertiary sector is more attractive. These findings suggest that low level certificates are providing a way into education for students for whom school is not meeting their needs in some way, or a way out of unemployment for young people.[10]

Several providers also spoke about feeling like 'guinea pigs' with frequent restructuring of the PTE-TEC relationship: 'There seems to be no long term consistent plan.' 'The compliance and admin workload for a small organisation is very large'. Some observed that they would like more clarity around 'what does the government want us to do and how will that be measured?' Hudson (2006:54) terms this 'environmental turbulence' and observes that 'the

8 http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/tertiary_education/transition-from-school-to-tertiary

9 Tertiary Education Commission, 2009 p.28.

10 Loader, M. and J. Dalgety, 2008 p.11. Research with the young people themselves is needed to clarify why they are making these choices.

complex multi-agency and multi-professional configurations needed for an effective transition service' can be negatively affected by such turbulence, particularly with respect to the way partnerships operate.

In commenting on restructuring, managers generally (although not universally) regarded the disestablishment of the TEC relationship managers with dismay. The website interface was described by some as 'faceless' and document-heavy, which was particularly challenging for small organisations. Many of these missed being able to phone up a TEC advisor. They reported commonly experiencing a 2-3 day wait via a service site. Some commented that the answers received were sometimes unhelpful and even contradictory. One provider observed 'it was wonderful [before], now it's the pits'. Another noted the contrast between the new approach and the work they themselves did which was 'all about building relationships': 'TEC has taken the relationship out of the equation'.

That many of those interviewed in this strand of the research spoke of feeling 'on the margins', being the 'Cinderella' of the sector, and feeling like 'guinea pigs' suggests that a stable transitions infrastructure has yet to emerge for school leavers with low or no qualifications. This, despite the relative longevity of the Youth Training and Training Opportunities programmes (established in 1999) that are intended to cater for these young people[11].

[11] For detailed statistical analysis of participation in the Youth Training programme see P. Mahoney, 2010.

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Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet

Research on Regional and Community Organisations

Supporting Young People to Make Good Education Employment Linkages

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research by discussing the work of your organisation with Dr. Jane Higgins.

This information sheet introduces the research programme. If you have any questions please contact Jane at *jane.higgins@lincoln.ac.nz* or by cell phone: 021 0654 606.

The overall research programme.

The research programme on education employment linkages is a five-year study funded by the Foundation for Research Science and Technology. The programme focuses on systems for supporting young people to make good education employment linkages. Our work is being guided by an external reference group of representatives from seven government agencies. So far we have completed a literature review identifying what is known from international research about this topic. We have also prepared overview maps of current support systems in New Zealand. These reports and further information can be obtained from *www.eel.org.nz/*.

Regional and community organisations stream.

The research programme is divided into four streams, addressing systems of support in school-communities, in regional communities, in Māori and Pasifika communities, and in employer-led channels. Jane is leading the research stream on regional and community based organisations. She is visiting a range of organisations around the country with the aim of exploring how these organisations are developing 'best practice' in working with young people in transition. Of particular interest are providers' expertise and reflections on:

- how best to work with the young people who form their client base;
- how aspects of the wider system of education-employment transition (e.g. schools, tertiary education/training institutions, social services, employers, education and welfare policies etc.) help or hinder this work.

Organisation visits

To explore these issues, Jane is visiting organisations involved in helping young people in transition. Each visit is anticipated to take about an hour. On the next page are some questions that may help guide the discussion (although not all will be relevant to every organisation).

The final report will include proposals for how current support systems in New Zealand might be improved, to be developed further in year four of the EEL research programme.

The report will list the names of organisations who have participated unless anonymity is requested, but nothing from discussions during the visits will be published that could identify individuals or organisations. All participants will be sent a copy of the report in draft, and will be given an opportunity to offer comments and suggestions for change in advance of its publication.

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

Introduction

What does your organisation do to help young people with education-employment linkages (e.g. advice, guidance, support, planning, training, placement, follow-up)?

'Best practice'

What have you learned about how young people learn best?

Do you have a case management/mentoring process and, if so, how does it operate?

What do you look for when appointing staff? How do you find good staff?

What reflections do you have about linking your training/assistance to formal education qualifications and processes? Is it straightforward to do this? Could the system for doing this be improved? Do you think it is a good idea to do this?

Have you established links to the local labour market and, if so, how do you maintain these (e.g. networking, local demand, job placement)?

What forms of assistance do your students need beyond training? Can you help them to find this assistance? How easy/difficult is this to achieve?

What kinds of relationships exist between you as a provider and your local schools, community, employer and worker organizations? How well do these work? For example, do these relationships foster local support and shared expectations for the different groups involved? Do they help young people develop pathways? What would help to make the system work better?

Are there other aspects of your work not already touched on that relate to what works in helping young people craft education-employment linkages? Do you have reflections on what doesn't work?

The national picture

Do you have connections (know about, talk to, have formal links) with national networks assisting young people in their education-employment linkages (e.g. Youth Transition Services, Career Services, Polytechnics, Universities, Private Training Establishments, Disability Action etc)?

Do you have any reflections on the system of assistance for young people who are making education-employment linkages – in your region, and nationally? Does it work? How might it work better?